CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1 - 57. (canceled)

58. (new) A method of filling a row of bags, the method comprising the steps of:

a) conveying the row of bags horizontally until one of the bags is open upward into alignment underneath a filling apparatus;

b) stopping the one bag underneath the filling apparatus and, while the one bag is stopped underneath the apparatus and without vertical displacement of the one bag, thereafter sequentially

c) shifting the apparatus from a position wholly above the one stopped bag into a position opening inside the one stopped bag generally at a base of the one stopped bag;

c) pouring bulk material from the apparatus into the one stopped bag while simultaneously raising the apparatus upward until the one stopped bag is generally full and a predetermined upper position is reached with the apparatus still engaged in the one stopped bag;

e) stopping pouring of the material from the apparatus when the upper position is reached;

f) lifting the apparatus out of the one stopped bag;

g) thereafter displacing the one stopped bag horizontally out from underneath the apparatus; and

h) repeating steps a) through g) with the next bag in the succession of bags.

59. (new) The bag-filling method defined in claim 58 wherein the bags are conveyed at a fixed height without substantial vertical displacement.

60. (new) The bag-filling method defined in claim 58 wherein the apparatus is shifted down into the bag at a speed different from that at which it is raised in the bag.

61. (new) The bag-filling method defined in claim 58, further comprising the steps of

during step d)

d') pouring a predetermined volume of the material into the one stopped bag and thereafter

d") monitoring a weight of the bag and pouring the material into the one stopped bag until the bag's weight reaches a predetermined desired weight.

62. (new) The bag-filling method defined in claim 61 wherein during step d') the material is poured at a greater volume/time rate than during step d").

63. (new) The bag-filling method defined in claim 58, further comprising the step of:

i) sealing the bags in a sealing station downstream of the filling apparatus.

64. (new) The bag-filling method defined in claim 58, further comprising prior to step c) the step of

b') laterally squeezing the bags to open same.

65. (new) The bag-filling method defined in claim 64 wherein the bags are laterally squeezed by being gripped at opposite edges and then pushing the gripped opposite edges toward each other.

66. (new) The bag-filling method defined in claim 58, further comprising the step of

aspirating dust from the bag at the filling apparatus.

67. (new) An apparatus for filling a row of bags, the apparatus comprising:

a filler having a downwardly open tube with a vertically displaceable lower end;

discharge means for pouring bulk material down through the tube;

transport mean for conveying the row of bags horizontally in steps underneath the tube while holding the bags against vertical displacement;

drive means for shifting the tube between a position wholly above the bags and a position opening inside the bags generally at a base of the one stopped bag; and

control means connected to the transport means, discharge means, and drive means for, when each bag is stopped underneath the tube, sequentially

a) stopping each bag underneath the filler tube and holding the bag against vertical movement,

b) pouring bulk material from the tube into the stopped bag through the tube while simultaneously raising the tube upward until the stopped bag is generally full and the tube reaches a predetermined upper position still engaged in the stopped bag,

c) stopping pouring of the material from the tube when the upper position is reached,

d) lifting the tube out of the stopped bag, and

e) stepping the row of bags horizontally and thereby displacing the filled bag horizontally out from underneath the apparatus until the next bag in the succession of bags is stopped underneath the tube; and

f) repeating steps a) through e) sequentially with the next bag stopped underneath the tube.

68. (new) The bag-filling apparatus defined in claim 67 wherein the filler has a hopper for the bulk material.

69. (new) The bag-filling apparatus defined in claim 67 wherein the filler has

a frame;

a drive motor on the frame; and

a transmission connecting the drive motor to the tube.

70. (new) The bag-filling apparatus defined in claim 67 wherein the drive means is of variable speed.

71. (new) The bag-filling apparatus defined in claim 70 wherein the drive means shifts the tube downward at a faster speed than it uses to shift the tube upward.

72. (new) The bag-filling apparatus defined in claim 67 wherein the control means operates the pouring means during step d) of d') pouring a predetermined volume of the material into the one stopped bag and thereafter

d") monitoring a weight of the bag and pouring the material into the one stopped bag until the bag's weight reaches a predetermined desired weight.

73. (new) The bag-filling apparatus defined in claim 61 wherein during step d') the material is poured at a greater volume/time rate than during step d").

74. (new) The bag-filling apparatus defined in claim 67, further comprising

means for sealing the bags in a sealing station downstream of the filler.

75. (new) The bag-filling apparatus defined in claim 67, further comprising

means for laterally squeezing the bags to open same.

76. (new) The bag-filling apparatus defined in claim 75 wherein the means for laterally squeezing includes

a pair of grippers engageable at opposite edges if the bags and

means for pushing the gripped opposite edges toward each other underneath the tube.

77. (new) The bag-filling apparatus defined in claim 67, further comprising

means for aspirating dust from the bag at the filling apparatus.